

Factors Associated with Malnutrition Among Community-dwelling Malnourished Older People in Sri Lanka: A Qualitative Study

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Malnutrition among older persons has become a major public health concern. Although several epidemiological studies on this area were conducted, related qualitative studies are scarce. Hence, this study was aimed to explore the factors perceived to be contributing to malnutrition among older people in Sri Lanka. The malnourished older people were selected from a quantitative study using Mini Nutritional Assessment (MNA). A qualitative study was undertaken using fifteen focus group discussions. A semi-structured interview guide was used to facilitate the focus group discussions, which were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and checked. The transcripts were used as data and were analysed using a thematic approach. The mean age of the participants was 68.74 years (SD: 6.32). The age range was 60-97 years. Four major themes emerging: factors affecting dietary patterns(loss of appetite, physical work, food preparation, gender roles, eating with others) , factors affecting food choices (knowledge, taboos), health status (disease conditions, restrictions) and psychological challenges (mood changes, loneliness, family issues, loss of children/spouse, acceptance). Some of the strategies highlighted to overcome these factors include involvement in religious activities and in physical activity. Public health professionals need to understand and cultivate an awareness of sociocultural norms and family dynamics and recognize these realities to improve nutritional status of community-dwelling older people.

Keywords: Community-dwelling, older people, malnutrition, Sri Lanka